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## OUR CAPITOL BUILDING

One of the privileges of serving as part of the Senate leadership is having an office in our wonderful state capitol. For the past ten years, I've been honored to serve in the chambers where so many others have served before. My walnut desks in both chambers have been original, designed by the Capitol architect, Elijah Myers. Today, my desk on the Senate floor is located beneath the portrait of Eva McCall Hamilton, the first woman elected to the Michigan Legislature in 1920, which serves as a constant reminder of how far women have come.

As I walk the halls of this wonderful building, recognized nationally for its architectural and artistic importance, I am reminded of the words of Governor Croswell at the dedication ceremony in 1879, that this structure stands as "evidence of the lasting taste, spirit and enterprise" of the citizens of this state. And I marvel at the restoration work completed in 1992 that painstakingly restored the Capitol to its original Victorian glory.

Prior to the restoration, the building had become a maze of small offices created on half floors as the state struggled to house elected officials and their staffs. Now most of the legislators are located in buildings across the street, with only a very few having offices in the Capitol itself. The half floors have been eliminated, and the building has been restored with authentically painted colors, patterns and furnishings that recreate the aura of another age.

My office is actually on the ground floor level which is plain and unadorned compared to the splendors on the floors above. Elijah Myers originally designed this level for store rooms and an armory, and there are rumors that the horse stables were at one time located on this level as well. The walls on this level have been plastered and painted to resemble the exterior facade of sandstone outside. During the restoration, great attention to detail was made to restore the Capitol to its original appearance, and the ground floor is no exception. While the floors on this level are no longer covered with the simple pine flooring strips of the original construction and the lighting fixtures are now electric rather than gas, those lighting fixtures incorporate the design of the original gas cock which was found during the restoration.

Along with the privilege of having an office in the Capitol, however, come some rules and regulations established by the restoration committee that our offices must follow. We were prohibited from bringing any wood into the building; all wooden pieces must be reflective of the Victorian period. Our floor desks are a strange mix of old and new as almost every desk has a laptop computer and a telephone which are tastefully housed in a walnut side board designed to match our original desks.

Restoration efforts utilized decorative paint to cover the nine acres of every ceiling and wall as well as hundreds of doors and window frames, miles of wainscot, and dozens of cast iron columns. The wainscot is actually soft wood painted to look like walnut, and the columns which look like marble are actually iron. The effect was achieved by painstakingly applying layer upon

layer of paint by hand, but these can be easily chipped and are expensive to repair. The walls have also been carefully painted with every kind of paint technique known to Victorian artists. For that reason, pictures in offices can only be hung from picture rails, and easels are used throughout the building when signs or banners need to be displayed. Tape is a huge “no-no”, as are picture hooks. No items can be leaned against or touch the wainscot on painted surfaces.

Our state capitol is beautiful and its restoration efforts earned the nation’s highest preservation award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. All of us now housed in this wonderful facility take very seriously our duty to preserve the beauty of the building so that we can prolong the Capitol’s useful life indefinitely.

By Senator Bev Hammerstrom  
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